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ABSTRACT

Community colleges are failing to realize their potential because of problems at the very highest level of policy and management decision-making. Publicly elected trustees are apt to have political allegiances. Community college boards are usually too small to represent the range of talent and experience needed for constructing effective trustees supporting groups. The small size of these boards also prohibits committee work and forces the board to act as a committee of the whole, thereby wasting valuable board time. The political implications and the difficulties implicit in the structure and operation of many boards force community college presidents to devote inordinate amounts of time to work with, motive, and staff trustees functions; furthermore, the administrative and management duties of presidents and boards are not clearly delineated. State superboards often devitalize institutional boards and make them powerless. Boards of trustees do not conduct systematic self-studies to test the effectiveness of present practices and to design improvements where necessary. The author recommends methods of correcting these problems, suggests that the community college trustee resource be studied in depth, and that three major national education associations mount a program designed to accomplish major increases in the effectiveness of trustee lay leadership. (Author/DC)

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A NEW LOOK AT COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARDS OF TRUSTEES AND PRESIDENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Suggestions for Change

By: Francis C. Pray

This paper deals with the roles of boards of trustees and their members and chief executive officers in directing policy and in management of public community colleges. The author, Mr. Pray, brings years of experience in educational management and policy development to the assignment. He is honorary chairman of Frantzreb, Pray, Ferner, and Thompson, Inc., Arlington, Virginia. The essay is presented by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, One Dupont Circle, N. W., Washington, D. C. with support from the Shell Companies Foundation. Copies are available at a cost of $ 1.50 each from the Association.

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Foreword

This paper has been written at the invitation of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. In it the writer has been asked to look at the composition, organization and operation of the policy determination and management structure represented by the trustees and the chief executive officers of public community colleges, and to suggest how these human resources might be further enhanced.

The response to the invitation is a personal essay. It in no sense pretends to be a scholarly document. It was begun under an assumption that present practices so widely followed in selection and organization of community college boards were probably adequate, provided certain improvements could be made in style and operating effectiveness.

As the examination proceeded, the writer began to feel a little like Lewis Carroll examining the world behind the looking glass. He began more and more to realize that the community college trustee system in operation is different from the reality he is persuaded exists on this side of the mirror; more insubstantial, more in need of re-shaping than he had supposed.

The outline has come down to this: The problems are serious:

> ...The present system of politically generated boards of trustees does not provide a consistently viable policy guidance system for community college governance.
>
> ...The nature of composition, organization and operation of too many community college boards fails to provide a vehicle for responsible performance of the proper trustee role in governance in higher education. Some of these problems, at least, are an inheritance of origins.
>
> ...The trend toward super-boards and control at state level, <u>when accompanied by emasculation of institutional boards</u>, serves neither the system nor the institution as well as each deserves.

> ..."Sunshine laws," requirements of "disclosure," increasing financial liability of trustees, and particularly the politicization of many boards tend to drive out or discourage some well-qualified persons from serving as trustees. ...The problems of the community college president are compounded by modes of operation of many community college boards which discourage some administrators from continuing to serve and are a subtle deterrent in the process of finding top replacements.

A new modus operandi is needed to correct these shortcomings and meet these problems while continuing proper responsiveness to the special requirements of community colleges which may differentiate them from more traditional kinds of higher education institutions.

In view of the critical nature of the problem, responsible parties concerned with community colleges should initiate extended discussion and study of the issues as soon as practicable in order to encourage change toward a more responsible and better-operating governance system. The national associations should take leadership.

Acknowledgements

In preparation of this paper the writer has profited greatly by conversations on the subject with Robert L. Gale, president, Association of Governing Boards; Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., president, and his colleagues, of AACJC; Marie Martin, director, community college unit, Bureau of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Office of Education; and William H. Meardy, executive director, the Association of Community College Trustees, and with his own colleagues whose work has involved them in related matters.

The writer is grateful for this assistance but knows the reader will understand that any conclusions drawn are his responsibility alone.

The literature, also, has been scanned and a few of the more useful and/or provocative references are given at the end of this paper.

* * * *

Finally, it must be emphasized that this task has been undertaken with an earnest desire to be helpful, to bring the writer's considerable experience with trustee matters to bear on the problems of governance of community colleges, a part of the educational system for which he has much admiration and which he has had some opportunity to study. He hopes his comments and recommendations, blunt as they are, will not be interpreted as lack of awareness of the outstanding contributions made by many hard-working and committed trustees and presidents.

The hope is that as these points of view are examined carefully and thoughtfully, they may contribute in a small way to elimination of some of the weaknesses of the system and to the effectiveness of those lay persons and professionals concerned in its governance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most are aware today that in higher education there is a general slacking off of enrollment. Many private and a number of public institutions have excess capacity.

Population trends are only part of the reason. A growing questioning of the effectiveness of the process of conventional higher education, and the realization that claims of economic values in traditional higher education may be substantially inflated, have combined to exacerbate the problem.

The striking exception to this phenomenon is in the public community colleges.

As the newest major component in higher education, as the only segment with immediate prospects of substantial continuing growth, as the component serving, and willing to serve, a significant part of the population not hitherto served by other and more traditional institutions, it is terribly important that community colleges succeed and succeed well.

It is imperative, therefore, that the boards of trustees, which substantially decide their goals and roles and approve their programs, and the chief executive officers, who administer them, work not only effectively in their respective roles but effectively together as important elements in management.

There is a considerable urgency, indeed, for increased attention to these matters affecting policy determination and administration, for it is not too much to say that tensions and confused relationships between trustees and presidents in many institutions are severely inhibiting progress.

The increasingly political nature of some boards, combined with heavy board involvement in details of administration, increasing trustee financial liability, and related factors will certainly make it increasingly difficult in many cases to attract able and well qualified candidates for the trustee position.

These factors also operate to drive some of the best chief administrators from the field in frustration and disappointment,

and will increasingly discourage other able potential candidates from seeking the job.

So we encounter the paradox of institutions at the cutting edge of educational service, needed as never before, particularly in this time of economic crisis, failing to realize their potential because of problems at the very highest level of policy and management decision-making.

The writer believes fundamental changes are needed. He will argue for them on the bases of pragmatism and principle, and will hope to justify them at least as much from experience and example as theory.

II. THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

A. The Community College Board is Different

It is often held that community college trustees march to a different drummer than do trustees of the longer established public and private four-year and graduate colleges and universities. Whether the beat be different or not, certainly the community college trustee and the board on which he serves can safely be called sui generis.

On average, the community college board is small in size. Over 87 percent have fewer than 10 members. Only the boards of public four-year institutions come close; about 59 percent are under 10 persons in size. For comparison, note that over half the boards of private institutions have at least 20 or more members; only 3.5 percent of the private four-year and 12.6 percent of the private two-year have fewer than 10 members.

A second salient characteristic of community college boards is the frequency of their meetings. These boards tend to meet more frequently than others. Some meet twice or more a month and the great majority meet at least 12 times a year.*

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*Rauh[15]

The third characteristic of the community college trustee and boards is their "public-ness." The overwhelming majority, almost 95 percent of the trustees, have political origins, either through election (59.8%) or appointment by public officials (35%). In the public four-year institutions the situation is strikingly different with fewer (79.9%) politically generated, the largest number being appointed (76.1%) and far fewer (3.8%) publicly elected. Among the private institutions, except for ex officio and courtesy members, all except two percent are generated through other than a political source. (Figures from a survey by the Association of Governing Boards.)

The trustee of the private institution has a responsibility, because his institution is chartered in the public interest, to be sure that the institution behaves with due regard to the interests of society and the integrity of education. Within this broad responsibility, however, he usually owes no formal obligations for his task to any agency other than to the institution itself. Exceptions are those serving under full or partial responsibility to a sponsoring church.

Most of the trustees of the public institution, on the other hand, act in a sense as agents for their political origins.

A series of other differences may exist. One believes that more community college trustees may receive stipends and expense reimbursement. Stipends are infrequent among trustees of other kinds of institutions and almost non-existent among trustees of private institutions many of whom, indeed, pay their own expenses and, in addition, make significant cash or other gifts to their institutions, a practice, one would judge, exceedingly rare among trustees of community colleges.

And finally, it should be recognized that community college boards come in a substantial variety of styles and types. While most of the characteristics mentioned above apply to many, perhaps a majority, of boards, there are exceptions. There are super-boards at state level, operating far above the

daily concerns of individual institutions. There are county boards, system boards, in addition to, or instead of, boards for individual institutions. Official advisory boards with more limited power fill in some of the crannies, and advisory boards with no authority except the power of moral suasion fill in some of the others.

The writer is aware of these and will ask the reader, as principles of trusteeship are adduced or conclusions and suggestions are attempted, to apply them in terms of the special situations he or she knows.

B. The Implications of Origin, Composition, Organization, and Operation.

It is a general conclusion of the writer that the characteristics of community college boards outlined in the preceding section present more problems and difficulties than answers. While acknowledging that a happy combination of competent men and women of good will can accomplish much even if operating under less than ideal conditions, the writer believes that the accomplishment of those tasks which are or should be expected of the community college board is made difficult by the conditions under which the typical board is organized and operates.

In this section we shall state a series of assumptions (presumptions!) as to those principles of responsibility, membership, organization and operation which are widely accepted as characteristic of well-functioning boards and then see how the typical community college board really measures up.

1. Origin, The Duty to be Accountable.

Accountability is a fashionable term these days, but the frequency with which it is used may be a measure of the degree to which it needs to be recognized.

Accountability runs many ways - to society, to taxpayers, to students, to the appointing or electing body, to the institution. Confusion may exist as to allocation.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of community college trustees are politically generated provides a ready frame-work not only for confusion but for possible abuse of the trustee function.

While many trustees serve conscientiously, ably, and constructively, no matter what their origin, one former president has remarked, "Too many start running for re-election the day after election and their every public action is calculated to advance political aspirations."

Since many candidates for the position have to find a platform, the temptation too often is to find one which gives a competitive edge in the election. One hears the expression, "being a watchdog," and the like, especially where a constituency may be thought to be uninformed, or emotionally aroused, or arousable.

William H. Meardy, executive director of ACCT, in a forthright editorial statement in the Advisor, newsletter of his organization, warned of the danger of the ultimate abuse of the system of public election to boards.

Noting what he believes is a trend for teachers and instructors to run for community college boards and school boards, he wrote:

"It would be a mistake for the trend to go too far. There is a risk that unions could take over the governance of our institutions by getting their teacher-members elected or appointed to community college boards."

Here we would have a conflict of interest, indeed!

Such political motivations have no place in trusteeship, and while, as said before, many able and properly motivated persons run to be trustees of community colleges, the system, being susceptible to abuse, is abused.

On the positive side, one hopes that perhaps those so elected or appointed may have a keener awareness of the obligation to keep in mind the wider social interest than the trustee who owes his election to those already on the board or

to some other "non-public" origin, such as alumni or church. There are always trade-offs.

The system of appointing trustees by governors or other officials is subject to abuse also, especially where political considerations are a factor. One would believe it may result in a higher proportion of able and qualified persons than public election, however, for reason that the visibility given to these appointments results in a political plus or minus with implications in important places. Many governors, for instance, give long and careful thought to these appointments and the results, in a majority of cases, would seem to be adequate.

We shall come back to this issue.

2. Composition, The Duty to be Knowledgeable.

Boards are called upon to make judgments in a wide variety of areas ranging from finance through educational policy and student relations to buildings and grounds. A board, therefore, would do well to have among its members a distinguished expert in the field of each commonly met problem.

There are those who maintain, and with some justice, that expertise should be hired in consultants or staff. True, but the guidance of other laymen in the process of making judgments among the recommendations and reports of experts may nevertheless best be provided by board members who know what probing questions to ask and can provide answers to fellow board members in later sessions as they seek clarification or interpretation.

Most board members are intelligent, informed, interested people. However, the most serious mistake a trustee can make is to believe that he can become an expert in any field in time to be able to know key questions to ask, let alone judge between alternative proposals. But if a fellow board member, knowledgeable in the particular field, can help define the issues, cut through the verbiage and suggest the bases for

judgment, much can be accomplished.

Boards of many private institutions, believing in the validity of this principle, undertake exhaustive self-studies to determine competencies they should have represented and then conduct thoughtful searches for men and women of proven competence in those fields to serve on the board.

Among backgrounds and competencies which should be represented in a well-structured board, for instance, are these: board expertise and depth of experience in finance, health, management theory and organizations, higher education, plant planning and management and public relations and development. It should contain bridges to the constituencies of alumni, youth, business and corporate and social influence, labor, and politics as appropriate. It should represent but not be artificially slavish to the nature of the market, geographical diversity, to sex, age and ethnic considerations, etc.

Members ideally are identified in terms of the needs of the institution, not in terms of the needs or ambitions of the aspiring candidate for a trustee position!

This thoughtful logical process of constructing a board is not open to many community colleges. Not only is the board small, but the necessity to depend for membership on the availability of men and women who will enter or have entered the political arena also severely reduces flexibility of choice.

The situation may be improved somewhat where the origin is an appointing official, but even here political considerations are not unknown. One knows of exceptions, especially at the level of the state superboard, but the further away the board gets from the appointing official, the greater the chance for factors other than politics to become operative in its representation. And, of course, the intrinsic problem of small size limits opportunities further in each case.

3. Organization, The Duty to Reason and Reflect

Small boards which meet frequently cannot afford the luxury - or the advantages - of having functioning committees.

There is evidence that the majority of boards of community colleges function as committees of the whole on most matters. This means, of course, that they function as executive committees, or, all too frequently, as management committees, a role which is not only not a proper function of trustees but actually counter-productive in terms of management effectiveness!

In the committee system in larger boards, more systematically planned, there is time and manpower - and a variety of competencies available, as noted above - for development of working committees to explore problems in depth, as surrogate for the whole board. The whole board then has time to devote at least part of its energies to reasoned, reflective consideration of the role and goals of the institution in its charge - consideration which would provide a proper philosophical base and a unifying background for the making of judgments in a broader context than otherwise possible under day-to-day pressures.

4. Operation, The Duty to be Effective.

We have noted earlier that all too many small boards operate as committees of the whole, primarily as would an executive committee. With each member busy on every problem, the board runs two particular risks:

Since there is always too little time left, after what has to be done is done, to consider the larger philosophical or social issues of the community college role, policies in these areas are framed by default.

Since alert, eager people with a desire to be helpful seem inevitably compelled to be busy, and since it is human nature to do what one best understands, or feels one understands, the board soon begins to get heavily involved in administration far below the policy level. It also discovers and proves one of management's oldest laws: "Time spent in board discussion will vary in inverse proportion to the amount of money involved," or, more loosely, "to the real importance of the decision to the institution."

A competent chairman can do much to alleviate these tendencies but the conditions under which the typical small board operates as a committee of the whole bring tremendous temptations to fall into these operational traps.

If every board member is expected to be, or feels he is expected to be, an expert on everything, he may rapidly become ineffective for anything. How much better, if the bodies can be made available, for a number of smaller groups to become especially knowledgeable about specific areas, get a grasp of the issues, put the necessary policies in context, and then recommend needed action to the board.

Individual top college staff can work with each committee, by delegation from the president. A far larger body of understanding reaches the board than when everything has to pass the constricted neck of one channel to one set of minds, each of which must read and hear everything in order to decide anything.

5. Morale and Dignity, The Duty to be Decent.

Anyone who has witnessed the shameful spectacle of open wrangles in board meetings, and, in one case, a member of a public board in an open meeting exchanging obscenities with a spectator, knows that it is necessary to stress, again, that boards which cannot attain a high degree of humanity, mutual respect, agreement on decency in interpersonal relationships, are facing a crisis which risks not only their loss of self-respect but the loss of respect for the institution.

One public board, suddenly aware of the spectacle it was creating, adopted a written "gentlemen's agreement" on operational imperatives to provide for orderly transaction of business. Not surprisingly, it found that its own self-imposed restraint began to affect the individual members and produced a new degree of humanity (humaneness) in approaching the troublesome problems of the institution and its constituencies.

Other horror stories surface quickly when one asks around:

...individual trustees who give personal orders to college staff,

...the trustee who invites a faculty member to "be his personal pipeline, because other trustees have them,"

...the trustee who foments disruption by holding unauthorized meetings with student groups.

These practices, and others like them, are all too common. Being a good trustee demands some degree of human greatness. A board whose individual members cannot overcome the temptations to express self-pride and self-interest, and cannot submerge themselves into a sincere common concern for the institution must face this as a special problem, indeed.

These problems are encountered occasionally in board operations in all kinds of institutions. In the community college, the problem of keeping cool, behaving with dignity, responding thoughtfully, is exacerbated by:

...the political nature of many boards,

...the smallness of size, so that most members may feel constrained, or may be expected to be ready, to have an opinion on everything,

...the intensity of feeling generated by problems of human relations, and varying perceptions and expectations inevitably faced by an institution which is near the cutting edge of social progress, and

..."sunshine laws" which, when improperly framed or administered produce tension and a crisis atmosphere.

Other Board Functions

Several other essential functions of boards of trustees, all critically important, are grouped below. They are not affected so much by the special characteristics of community college boards as are those functions noted above. Since most boards of trustees, however, spend all too little time performing these functions, and since community college boards are no exceptions to this finding, they are continued below.

6. Defining Mission: The Duty to Decide What It Is All About.

Within the limitation of the appallingly limited time most boards give to policy matters, trustees in many institutions fail to give adequate attention to planning institutional mission and allocation of resources in terms of the mission.

Each trustee should have a clear picture of the educational needs of the community, not merely in conventional terms of post-secondary education but in terms of the spectrum of services which might be expected of his community college with a total dedication to educational service - all within the bounds of a realistic definition of physical and educational capability. He should know the market, the demographic, social and economic characteristics of the community; the needs of the community for trained people. He should understand these in terms of the larger needs of society, the sweeping changes in our economic, social, and political life.

He should have a clear picture of the resources available, or which could be made available, and be willing to support all of the means which can be used to acquire resources for the institution.

He should have a clear perception of and insist on a written definition of the basic program of objectives of the community college in his charge.

He should participate in an ordering of priorities and insist there be prepared a time table for accomplishment.

And, above all, he should have a profound belief in the importance of education as a means of human uplift.

Neither the observations of the writer's colleagues nor his own experience suggest that this obligation to define mission and goals in the broadest sense is well satisfied by action of the average board, which tends to become so preoccupied with day to day matters that it has little time for self-education or reflection.

Too many boards of trustees make decisions and seek legislative support for people and programs without any attempt to put these into a context of total resource mobilization on a priority basis in terms of social and people needs. The purpose of trustee planning at this level is to be sure that the driest axle, not necessarily the squeakiest, gets the grease.

7. Evaluation: The Duty to Be Sure

Ask any trustee what is going well and what is going badly and he will have an answer. Ask him to say if his board has made any attempt to quantify each particular problem, analyze it systematically, or bring objective expertise to bear on it, and he or she usually cannot respond so quickly. The one exception may be in the area of building and grounds, which J. G. Paltridge calls "the traditional turf of trustees."

He should be constantly assuring himself that the institution is well managed, is properly administered, and that the operations climate is positive, constructive, and fruitful.

The trustee today, faced with growing questioning of the degree to which he must be held accountable to his trust, neglects this area of obligation at his peril. With increasing numbers of parents, students, faculty and interested citizens resorting to the courts for redress of real or fancied wrongs suffered at the hands of colleges, only the trustee who can demonstrate that he has acted prudently, is at least largely exempt from danger.

A few boards conduct a systematic evaluation of one of each of the five principal areas of college operation each year: finances, administration, educational program, student program, and - lastly and very importantly - the board itself.

Using consultants and volunteers to conduct the studies, the board in this way identifies problems and evaluates performance, of itself and others, just as systematically as the certified auditors validate the books at regular intervals.

The local board of John Tyler Community College* a few years ago adopted a specific resolution calling for the kinds of data which would enable it to evaluate success of the management and the institution in moving toward defined goals.

Going further, in setting up criteria for selections of a new president, the board postulated a number of specific tasks central to the evaluation of progress towards goals and devised questions to measure the presidential candidates' willingness and intention to provide such measures.

C. Boards and Superboards.

No essay on community college governance at the board and president level would be complete without some reference to what seems to be a persistent trend to the creation of superboards or other devices to increase control and influence over the community college at the state level.

The result in some cases has been the emasculation of local boards, or disappearance of local boards with meaningful powers and functions. Their place has sometimes been taken by "advisory boards" authorized as part of the state network. Some institutions have created informal and largely unofficial boards of advisors to serve in a public relations or development capacity.

Insofar as superboards are politically generated, the constraints of the political process are further worsened, so far as individual institutions are concerned, by remoteness and lack of personal knowledge of individuals or individual programs.

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*Listed as a sample board policy, pp. 40, 41, in Accountability and the Community College, John E. Roueche, George A. Baker III, and Richard L. Browneil, pub. by AACJC, 1971.

The proper role of the superboard is to be a part of a responsible government resource allocation system. Appropriating bodies have a right to expect that resources of the state be allocated in terms of total state needs and that they sustain institutional roles decided as necessary to state needs.

Having set missions and allocated resources, however, state boards cannot in a really meaningful way do more than issue directives for action and attempt to set, by prescription, the important policies which result in implementation at the institutional level. In the absence of any mechanism for meaningful local lay guidance and governance, quality and innovation become the victims of uniformity and control systems set up to protect the bureaucracy.

(A later section will attempt to come to grips with this dilemma of conflicting philosophies and values.)

D. The "No Board" Alternative

Many of the difficulties encountered in board-institution relations, combined with patently poor performance by many boards and individual trustees, have in recent months caused a number of academics and students to question the usefulness of having lay boards in the first place.

The writer's conviction should be made explicit at this point. He believes strongly in the principle of lay control, at policy level, of any and all of the professional activities which have significant impact on society. He would re-affirm an earlier statement:*

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*Pray[11]

> "The principle of providing lay policy leadership continues valid.
>
> "The evidence is overwhelming that when any professional group is left entirely to itself, whether it be a church, the military, a government, or an educational system, syndicalist structures become dominate. Traditions, the instinct for self-protection, and resistance to change combine to stultify progress and bring the organization to a further and further remoteness from public concerns and needs.
>
> "The record of performance by lay leadership, when functioning effectively, argues strongly that viability is inherent in the structure and that the problem is one of encouraging better performance and evolutionary change to adapt to new opportunities.
>
> "So, too, with boards of college and university trustees. With all their problems no one, in the opinion of this writer, as someone once said about democracy, has come up with a better system. Making the lay policy leadership system work is another matter."

And, of course, this is the issue.

III. THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT

Style and operations of the chief exeuctive officer of the public community college are inevitably shaped by the somewhat different relationships which seem to evolve as a reflection of the board differences.

How much of management style difference derives from practices in the secondary school field from which some of the institutions and apparently much of the board style has evolved, and how much has or should become an emulation of the senior institutions, are legitimate subjects for examination. Whether these differences are good or bad, or whether, even, they are necessarily inevitable, should concern us.

The task of being a president of a community college has to be one of great potential for both satisfaction and frustration.

It has the potential for satisfaction of a nature somewhat different from that available to other college and university presidents. There is a more pervasive immediacy; a greater number of opportunities to see, experience and even measure impact of programs; the opportunity to feel a part of a larger community which is not only "out there" as "town" but reaches inside and is woven into "gown" in complex and challenging ways.

It has the potential for frustration greater than that encountered as a rule by heads of more traditional institutions; first, because of the very existence of the kinds of conditions which offer the potential for satisfaction, and second, because the president of the community college operates in a structure and tradition which in many cases gives him unusual problems with his board of trustees.

The community college president, some might say, lives in a sort of never-never land between the kind of immediacy of every problem faced in the role of a superintendent of schools and that of president of the four-year institution. To the extent that he is perceived as a glorified school superintendent, he is deprived of the supporting prestige which is an asset of the college presidency. To the extent that he assumes the style of the presidency of a more conventional or traditional college or university, he shuts himself away to a degree from the kind of thinking, philosophy and involvements which reflect the special nature of his institution.

There are many great presidents of successful community colleges. There are others who are disputatious, unable to win community understanding, and/or apprehensive of or unable to work with boards of trustees or build a loyal and supportive staff.

The writer has observed many kinds of presidential and trustee styles, organizational structures, and relationships between president and board. Knowing how dangerous it is to generalize, he would nevertheless judge that whereas presidents of many four-year colleges and universities spend too little time working with, motivating, and staffing trustee activities, presidents of community colleges, on the other hand are forced by circumstances to spend too much time on such activities. And too large a part, certainly most of the "too much" part, is a result of political implications and the difficulties implicit in the structure and operation of many community college boards.

Part of the difficulty, indeed, is that there exists no widespread consensus on the special style, behavior, and problems of administration of community colleges which should enhance chances of success in the position.

The school superintendency is a long-established profession with, one believes, an adequate literature available as guidance. Books on the college presidency exist and conferences on the function are held regularly, but they are written by and are programmed for, overwhelmingly, presidents of four-year colleges and universities.

In one exception, Thomas E. O'Connell, president of Berkshire Community College, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in a doctoral dissertation submitted for publication in book form under the title "From Educator to Envoy," breaks down the duties of a president under five headings: Leader, Manager, Energizer, Envoy and Intellectual. He illustrates each at length.*

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*O'Connell[5]

While professionals may say that the principles of administration and management are the same, no matter what the level or kind of relationship we are talking about, the problems and situations, the languages and backgrounds, are not.

IV. THE TRUSTEES AND THE PRESIDENT: THE INTERACTION OF POLICY, MANAGEMENT, AND ADMINISTRATION

There are several ways to define the relationship of board and president. A simplistic definition often used is this: Trustees set policy and select management and the chief executive officer manages.

It is probable that an institution run rigidly on these lines wouldn't work, or wouldn't work for very long. No one has successfully defined policy so exactly that it covers all the cases or provides for that great mass of policy which is formed by operational imperatives and filters to the top where it may be stamped "OK" or "not OK." And no one has really defined management so precisely that it is always clear when trustees are meddling and when they are not (although it is pretty clear when they are meddling too much!).

It will help clarify the board-president relationship if there is recognition of the overlapping nature of the elements of policy, management, and administration.

A board may quite properly make what are essentially management decisions when it elects a president or approves the appointment of certain top key administrators, on recommendation of the president; but it proceeds at its peril, at least to the peril of the institution, if it dabbles in the details of student activity allotment for instance, or assignment of office space. The board may retain counsel to handle investment of endowment or capital funds, but it should not expect to approve the forms used for cash disbursements or be asked to approve or disapprove every budget change involving relatively few dollars and not affecting policy matters.

On the other hand, the president must not make policy decisions compromising the role, goal, or major allocation of resources of the institution unless he has trustee approval, although he can, indeed should, recommend action to the board. But he should not be expected to have to come to the board with the steady flow of administrative problems which cross his desk each day. If he administers poorly, it is not the board's job to take over administration, but to see that administration is improved. This, a management decision, may be accomplished either by assisting management, without getting into management, or by changing managers.

In a unique study of decision patterns of boards of trustees of a sample of public four-year institutions, Paltridge, Hurst and Morgan found that slightly under eight percent were what might be called policy decisions, almost 37 percent were what might be called management decisions, almost 50 percent dealt with what the writer would call administration, "detailed rules and procedure implementation, largely if not entirely within previously approved policy guidelines.*

There is reason to believe that a similar study of community college boards would show a similar pattern.

Presidents, of course, have also been known to make wasteful use of time, allowing themselves to be used by subordinates in the task of making routine decisions or handling problems which should be forced to decision at lower levels; or involving themselves in minor administrative matters as an ego-satisfying way of filling time or compensating for the inabilities of other administrators who should rather be helped to function, or be retrained, or replaced.

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*Paltridge[1]

One writer and consultant on trustee and management matters, Robert K. Greenleaf, believes that "A basic conceptual flaw in the conventional wisdom of institutional structure is the inadequacy - or even absence - of provision for trustees to be a functioning part of the institution's leadership."*

He adds, 'The role of administrator does not provide for adequate trustee functions."

While Mr. Greenleaf is doubtless correct in his assumptions of distribution of function and corrective measures necessary in the private institutions, the writer's conclusions, based on personal observations and on studies by others, suggests that trustees of community colleges, especially those of individual institutions, do not run much risk of straying too far away from management; indeed many of their pre-occupations are with matters which might better be left to administration.

The writer offers the following diagram in a effort to suggest a realistic picture of the flexible relationships among policy, management and administration which might be considered a reasonable working system.

No definition can be absolute or quantifiable; however, consensus can be reached on differences among policy, management, and administration, enough so that functions can be better performed and major disagreements avoided.

V. THE ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR ROLES

Three national educational associations have significant impact on the quality of trusteeship and management of community colleges. Of these the newest and most specialized is the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), Suite 1406, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W., Washington, D. C. 20024. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) serves trustees from all

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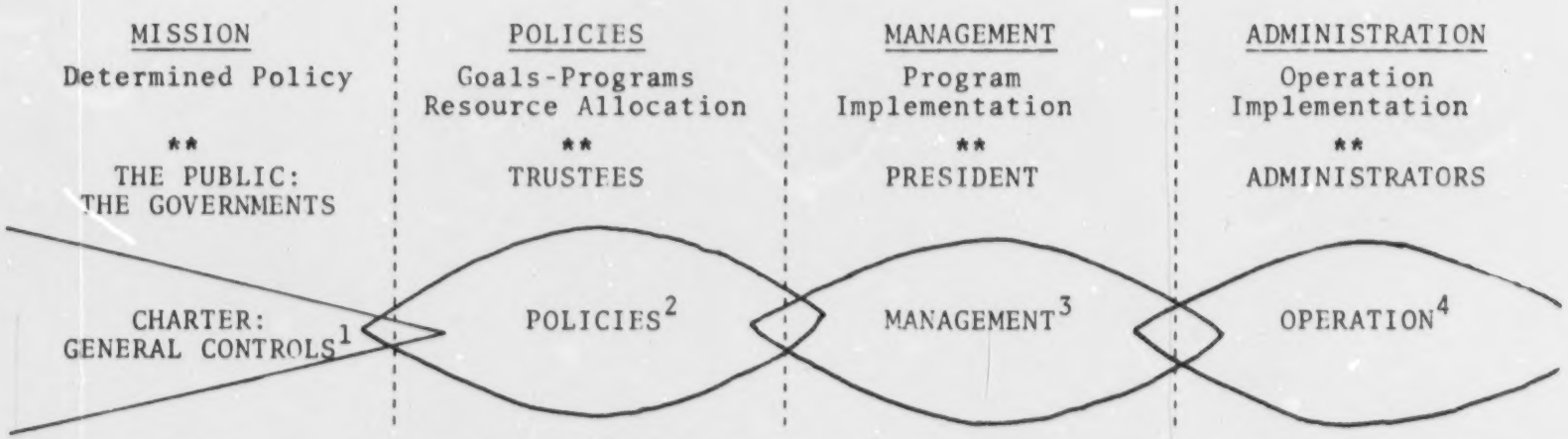
*Greenleaf[13]

THE OVERLAPPING ROLES*



1. Controls: Federal directives and constraints; e.g. Disclosure laws, equal opportunity, social security rules, etc., etc. State and other government education policies and general rules. Funding controls. Charter provisions.

2. Policies: Derive from controls and feed-back thereto. Reach area of management specifically in selection of management, approving management structure, resource allocation, evaluation, etc.

3. Management: President manages institution within policies, suggests policies when necessary or interprets necessity for policy. Handles management of administrative structure responsible for operations.

4. Operation: Administrators handle operations within policy and management decisions. Recommend management changes in terms of operational imperatives. Note implications for policy, through president.

*Figures show practical range of responsibilities and authority. Links between management and administration are provided by chief aides to the president.

This is a generalized picture only. In point of fact some legal and fiscal controls reach all the way into management and sometimes even into administration: E. g. where a state law directs the procedure for hiring employees, or a purchasing procedure. And, conversely, some contracts, as with unions, control policy decisions.

segments of Higher Education. The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC), the oldest of the Associations primarily devoted to this segment of higher education, is concerned through its national programs and its constituent Councils with all phases of community college and junior college operation. Its board includes community college trustees as well as presidents and others. AGB and AACJC are located at One Dupont Circle, Washington, D. C. 20036.

Each has a growing concern for the system of lay control represented by the community college boards of trustees and each is, through publications, studies, and seminars and meetings, making its own important contribution.

The time for their concern is appropriate. One finds a growing potential for conflict, misunderstanding and recrimination in too many institutions to be able to shrug it off as a temporary aberration or series of isolated incidents.

The economic situation, the changing expectations of large minorities, the growing militancy (albeit in a different style from that of the 60's) on the part of faculty and students, the Federal mandates affecting policy and management, a developing public suspicion that much is wrong with higher education - all these combine to complicate the life of trustee and manager alike.

Trustees and presidents who were reasonably successful in happier days are not now so successful. A sort of quiet search for scapegoats - in some places not so quiet - is going on among trustees and administrators, often polarized into not-too-well-thought-out political or professional positions in which stubbornness and expediency are replacing practicality and decency.

The Associations must face this situation directly and, through programs with their own boards and through enlightened and competent staff work, isolate the problems, expose them in detail, and attack them.

The ultimate beneficiaries are the community college students, and through them our society, which is what everything else is all about.

The national associations are a proper instrument for this leadership change role. They and probably they alone have the resources of people, the organization and programs which can affect the process. It is their duty to do so.

VI. REVIEW AND OBSERVATIONS

Management styles and organization in post-secondary education tend to become embedded in tradition and habit as do activities in any other human enterprise. Yet today the winds of change are blowing cobwebs out of many a musty corner of entrenched systems and upsetting relationships of the past which have become so comfortable - or at least so familiar - as to seem to have the stamp of final legitimacy.

Nowhere in the systems of higher education - not in curriculum, student relationships, physical plant concepts, development of educational tools, or even in financing problems - are the pressures for change falling with such impact as they are falling upon the trustees and chief executives of our colleges, institutes, and universities.

Among the trustees of universities, four-year colleges, two-year colleges, institutes and community colleges - private, state-related, state-owned, county-sponsored, or parts of systems - the trustees and boards of the public community college are unique.

Overwhelmingly the end-product of a political election campaign or political appointment, few trustees are products of the kind of institution they direct.

Further, these boards tend to be smaller, meet more often, and tend to become heavily involved (as boards) in operational problems and decisions. Many operate as committees of the whole.

Because a large number of trustees are publicly elected and because boards are small, many boards do not represent in their membership the range of talent, experience, and relationship thought to be a useful ingredient in constructing effective trustee supporting groups.

A majority of boards meet under one or another kind of public scrutiny. This characteristic, though desirable when properly controlled, is not infrequently used by politically-motivated trustees for personal satisfaction or political advantage. Techniques and practices of better and more effective operation under these conditions need to be learned and practiced.

Limited by size and lack of variety in talent, boards tend not to rely on or are unable to mount an effective committee system. Consequently there is rarely opportunity, or obligation, for individual trustees to learn any aspect of the community college in depth, to build knowledge which they might share through committee recommendations and discussions. The possible exceptions are financial matters and physical plant operation and planning, areas where everyone comes to believe himself knowledgeable. The consequent alternative, serving as a committee of the whole, results in abuse of time in discussion, since each matter of interest to any must occupy the attention of the whole, makes meaningful agenda difficult to complete, and results in boredom of some or, at the opposite extreme, over-hasty action as a result of impatience.

The practice of holding monthly or more frequent meetings exacerbates the problems referred to above. With time spent in special or adjourned and resumed meetings included, the trustees may rationalize the time spent as an evidence of their concern and loyalty, but an examination of the transcript will all too often show that too much time has been devoted to trivial and/or pro forma discussion and action.

Many presidents of community colleges suffer much under these all too prevalent practices of boards. Many take refuge in techniques of overwhelming the board with information beyond the capacity of trustees to understand, or simply plan not to bring real problems to the attention of the board because of its lack of ability or unreadiness to take the time to understand them.

On the other hand, many community college presidents, a lack they share with many others, have come to the chief executive's post without any real experience or professional training in working with, educating, motivating, even managing, if you will, the resource represented by lay leadership. We know all too little about the qualities required for success in this delicate relationship, nor is there an adequate training ground or adequate training materials available for the president's use.

Presidents, as do trustees, learn by doing and by observing. That so many learn by doing the wrong things, or by observing and following precedents themselves badly conceived, should give pause to those concerned.

A cynic, reading the preceding observations, might conclude that many boards of public community colleges have adopted the worst features of many public school boards and have found it difficult, if not impossible, because of mandated composition and operation, to adopt the best features of the college trustee system in general.

This writer, no cynic, believes there is more than a grain of truth in this observation. He does not agree with those who say the present system stressing elected or appointed trustees, small boards, frequent meetings, is a good one. Where it works, it works in spite of these factors, factors which in themselves make abuse possible and make poor performance easy.

We believe the time is now for a fundamental, new look at the public community college lay policy control and management system.

The next and concluding section will suggest what elements deserve further study and propose a mechanism for getting it done.

VI. SOME PROPOSITIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

As noted in the Introduction, the writer began this task with an assumption that the present norms in selection, organization and operation of community college boards were adequate, provided certain improvements could be made in operating effectiveness.

As he began to reflect upon the factors which characterize so many of the boards and their relationships with management, and as he found the tenor of these reflections borne out in the literature and available research and by the experience of colleagues, and especially as he compared them with principles which have been tested and found effective in other lay board relationships, he concluded that more fundamental change is needed.

Indeed, this essay may seem to have raised a series of indictments of much of the present system. It may properly be construed as doing so.

The general finding is that we have rather uniformly transferred a governance system long used by public schools* to community college governance without, apparently, making any real attempt at validating it in its new context by any serious re-examination of its applicability - its strengths or its weaknesses.

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*The writer, further, is persuaded that the school board system itself suffers from many similar faults. The failure of the mode at the community college level is not merely the failure of a good system in an inappropriate setting, but is evidence of basic shortcomings in the system itself. But that is another matter.

In the comparison, as it butts up against the longer matured and tested systems of lay policy guidance developed for the older established institutions of higher education, it appears to be inadequate. Where it works, it works because of a fortunate juxtaposition of well-disposed and talented trustees and exceptionably able presidents. But neither the system of generating boards, as most commonly used, nor the commonly adopted operating methods, encourage or make unusually likely the kind of performance the colleges merit.

Basic questions about the nature and accountability of community college lay control and about the basic role of management have been asked. These have been asked with full readiness to go beyond and/or outside presently accepted practices if that seemed indicated.

In the concluding sections of this essay we shall state a series of propositions (recommendations), discuss each very briefly, and then suggest what might be done to test these propositions and provide for implementation where desirable.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #1

Provide for a system of generating board members which will minimize political considerations and provide a better balance of talents and concern.

The present practice of public election, characteristic of many community college boards, particularly where partisan, results in the injection of politics into board operations; fails except by occasional happy accident, to give a proper variety of talents and backgrounds, and discourages service by many able persons.

Alternatives ought to be devised which, while meeting the need for accountability, will provide for both a better mix of individuals and a more responsible group to meet institutional needs.

It is not violation of the principles of democracy* to substitute a different method than public election for the trustee selection process.

No serious fault has been found with the appointive process in this regard. There has been steady progress in removing judges, for instance, from the public election process to the appointive route. The abuses of the election process became too flagrant. Similarly, in the case of attorneys-general, sheriffs, treasurers, justices-of-the-peace, town treasurers, not to speak of the Cabinet of the President of the United States, etc., these officers function more responsibly when reporting to a senior or a body which, responsible to an electorate, must turn in a good record. The only reasonable exception to this mode might be the case where the trustees have the taxing power. In this case their responsibility to those taxed become direct.

Other attractive alternatives exist. The community college board might be designed as a mix of a minority of elected members, a majority of appointed members, and perhaps a few others ex officio and/or elected by the other trustees.

A citizen's panel,** selected with the kind of care used in selecting blue-ribbon grand juries, but with the differing appropriate composition, might be made responsible for nominating trustees, just as boards representing legal societies

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*Nason[9] adds, "The case for popular election is of course based on doctrinaire democratic theory. Apart from that, little can be said for it. If elections are not tied to party politics, interest is apt to run low. On the other hand, educational issues do not readily fit into party politics, and if tied together the victor at the polls is more likely to reflect the general success of his party than the wisdon of his educational platform."

**After the writer had drafted this suggestion, he found a similar suggestion made by Louis H. Heilbron[3]. Also see Lee, Eugene C., and Bowen, Frank M., in The Multicampus University: A Study in Academic Governance. Report to the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, N.Y., McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971.

have a hand in evaluating and recommending appointments to the bench. Some governors already call upon such boards for nominations for appointment.

Whatever the method adopted, some system designed to avoid the potential for abuse which exists under the elective system should be considered and tested as an alternative.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #2

Enlarge the smaller boards to between 16 and 24 members in order to provide a greater variety of talents, experience, and expertise and in order to make possible the mode of operation proposed in the following section.

In an earlier section we discussed briefly the desireability of providing a range of variety in board memberships which can complement and supplement the needs of the institution and its staff.

This writer believes it is naive to believe that the assembly of a miscellaneous group of citizens, even provided they are reasonably intelligent and have great reservoirs of goodwill and interest, will result in a viable board. He has seen boards which do not include a single engineer setting policy for an engineering institution, boards without a single knowledgeable lawyer, boards without a single competent financier or money manager, facing complicated policy matters literally at the mercy of staff and consultants who, competent and well-meaning as they may be, should still be subject to responsible review and judgment by some knowledgeable member of the board.

In suggesting 16 to 24 members (many, many private institutions have more) room is provided for a greater variety of "input." If the composition of the board is then a function of careful planning rather than the happenstance of political election, the board can be designed to serve the institution in a maximum way.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #3

Organize a responsible committee system in order to escape the shortcomings of the mode of operating as a committee of the whole.

The limited number of members on the boards of many community colleges make a committee system unfeasible in many instances and leads to routine operation as a committee of the whole. Further, the typical board, both because of its smallness and because of the nature of its composition, does not contain the variety of talents, expertise and experience required if the committee system is to work.

The common practice of operating as a committee of the whole with frequent meetings poses another set of problems. The evidence is overwhelming that a great deal too much time of boards so operating is concerned with administrative rather than policy or top management issues and concerns. Not only does this lapse from good use of board time subvert the role of the trustee, it also operates to weaken and discourage the executive branch - the college president and his aides.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #4

Since the effectiveness of the president is heavily conditioned by the mode of behavior of the board, boards should, if they have not already done so, try to resolve in an operating manual statement a clear definition of the board's role in setting policy, the limited areas of management decisions where it may expect to participate with the president, and the areas of responsibility of the president.

An earlier section alluded to the troublesome nature of overlaps between and among public policy, board role in setting policy for goals and program, management imperatives, and the exigencies of administration.

In the writer's experience board activity, unless guided by a firm determination to stick to proper role, always tends to drift downward progressively from policy into details of administration. To the degree that it does so, it undercuts the effectiveness of the president. The practice also mercilessly reduces the usefulness of the board to the institution.

It is recommended that, as part of self-examination in this area, board representatives read carefully the booklet by Paltridge, Hurst and Morgan earlier referred to (see bibliography). Although the study dealt with boards at four-year public colleges, a personal letter from Mr. Paltridge suggests that in his opinion the findings apply generally. In addition, as noted, the study gives a series of workable, practical definitions of the various levels of decision-making which can be applied generally to board decision judgments.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #5

Board self-studies are a pre-requisite to change. Boards should undertake, on a regular basis, careful, thoughtful examination of their organization, the validity of their methods of selection, and their relationships with their constituencies and their management and administrative staffs. The object should be to test effectiveness of present practices and design improvements where indicated.

One board and president of a community college go into retreat together at least once a year. In frank, open, and friendly discussion they ask each other at least two key questions:

1. How could the board have functioned more effectively this year, and how can it improve its operation next year?
2. How could the president have functioned more effectively this year, and how can he improve his operation next year?

This kind of reflection demands a great deal of the participants. It demands that they forget any implications of politics, power, personal ambitions or the need to satisfy ego. It demands that they place the needs of the community and of their students first, teaching and operating problems second, and their own welfare third.

A first step in change toward more responsible board operation and more responsive management often occurs when the trustees and chief executive sit down together, often with objective outside assistance, to examine not only their organization and operation, but also their own consciences, as part of their obligation to serve better the institutions in their charge.

This examination should include an examination of Charter and By-Laws. Charters and By-Laws can and should be altered, to accomodate to the need to change.

Fundamental principles are involved here. Nothing less than the guidance and better management of the community colleges are at stake. To take refuge in the assumption that change is impossible because the Charter mandates a particular mode is another way of assuming that conditions are an act of God. Charters are man-made, fallible, and often drawn to recognize principles and practices which seemed wise at the time but which now may be outdated. A study of the Charter may well be a requisite early step in moves to improve the policy guidance and management of the institutions.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #6

The drift of control of community colleges toward the state and the increasing use of superboards in setting the operating policies for individual institutions calls for a redefinition of role.

Taxing agencies and related management responsible to the people have a right and an obligation to allocate resources between and among the various activities deserving support. Not only should the state, but the state must, determine how its resources can be best and most responsibly used at state level.

The superboard at the state level, for whatever system or part of a system it is responsible, has a responsibility for allocation and for definition of roles, goals, and missions, in broad policy terms, for the institutions responsible to it.

When the superboard attempts to go beyond that role, however, and concerns itself with program and operating policies of individual institutions, a function which can be performed better locally, it is depriving both the institution and the president of the kind of local volunteer board policy guidance which they need and should expect.

Advisory boards without power are not an adequate answer.

Where this trend to the superboard is established or underway, this writer believes it should be halted and a more reasonable, a more responsive system effected for dividing responsibilities which will protect the responsibility of the superboard for allocation of fiscal resources and setting mission and offer the individual institution the support which it needs in allocating resources within the institution and managing its own programs to fulfill this mission.

Some Suggestions and "In Conclusion"

The writing of this paper has been a provocative, provoking, interesting, and challenging task. Three conclusions seem to this writer to stand out very clearly:

1. The trustee resource for community colleges still has enormous potentials for development and service.
2. Fundamental change holds promise and would seem to be a pre-requisite for major improvement.
3. The performance of the task of president of the community college, as manager and chief administrator, could be made both easier and more effective if certain improvements could be made in the trustee structure in the context of which the president must work.

We will now add a fourth conclusion and devote the last section of this paper to its discussion.

4. Much more needs to be known about community college trustees, their composition, operations, and general behavior, as ingredient in any program or prescription for improvement.

This paper has tried to make the point that change is needed if community colleges are to enjoy the benefits of improved trustee guidance and if their chief executive officers are to function more effectively.

But change does not happen unless some agency undertakes the task of helping it happen.

PROPOSITION (RECOMMENDATION) #7

It is suggested, therefore, that the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges undertake, in cooperation with the Association of Community College Trustees and the Association of Governing Boards, to study the community college trustee resource in depth and mount a program designed to accomplish major increases in the effectiveness of trustee lay leadership.

Such a program might consist of these elements:

1. Research into the nature and extent of trustee lay leadership among community colleges. This should include a description of the kinds and numbers of boards, at various levels and of various types, having roles in the

leadership of community colleges as individual institutions, as parts of districts, at the state level, etc.

2. A tabulation of trustee boards by size, frequency of meetings, organization, and operation. (Badly needed is an extension of the relatively limited and more general studies done by AGB, University of California, et al, in an effort to have a better description of the whole universe of community college boards.)

3. An analysis of the process of generating board members and a census of board members in terms of method of selection, terms of service, occupations, age, etc.

4. Case studies of at least 2 or 3 each of various kinds of boards to acquire insights into operation, board-president relationships, perceived strengths and weaknesses, etc. Types examined should include, as a minimum, state superboards, system and district boards, individual institution boards, advisory boards serving institutions under direction of superboards, etc.

5. For comparative purposes, a sample of boards of private junior colleges, both free-standing and church-related, should be studied along similar lines.

6. One outcome should include preparation of a handbook and manual for community college trustees and presidents, based on findings above.

A panel of objective, experienced trustees and presidents should be organized to guide the study and to determine the principles of relationships and operating practices that should be expected to characterize effective trustee-presidential leadership at policy and management level.

* * * *

The over 3.5 million students now enrolled in community colleges and the growing numbers who will follow them deserve

no less than the highest possible level of performance in every part of the governance system and in every aspect of the governance process.

Finally, therefore, if the findings indicate major changes are needed, it would not be too much to hope that programs might be undertaken to encourage consideration and implementation of those changes in the systems which would bring this about.

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